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AUTHOR Holland, Dorothy C.; Eisenhart, Margaret A.
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ABSTRACT

This ethnographic study investigated why so few women become scientists or mathematicians. The study followed the lives of two groups of women, one black and one white, all with strong academic records, who were attending two southern U.S. universities, one predominantly black and the other predominantly white. The study was initiated in 1979 when the women were freshmen; with follow-up surveys in 1983 when they were due to graduate, and again 4 years later. A second survey of randomly selected women at each school indicated that the ethnographic findings could be generalized. The study describes the cultural systems and social practices of the peer culture, the kinds of gender inequality experienced, explores dissent and protest against male privilege, and compares experiences of the study group with those of students at other schools in the United States, Great Britain, and Australia. The study suggests that a major component of student culture is its organization around romance and attractiveness, with women constantly exposed to judgments of worth based on sexual attractiveness, and with much of their efforts addressed to improving that evaluation. It was also found that while race and class discrimination are experienced as group phenomena, gender discrimination is experienced as an individual phenomenon. (Contains 180 references.) (JLS)

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